‘Power as a Burden: The Slavophile Concept of the State and Lev Tolstoi’

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Slavophilism was one of the most original and important intellectual currents in Russia in the 19th century.[1] In the great philosophical debate in the 1840s and 1850s, however, the Slavophiles were on the losing side: their direct influence on the next generation of Russians was far less than that of their opponents, the Westernizers or *Zapadniks*.[2] The increasingly radicalized Russian *intelligenty* in the second half the 19th century were, as Ivan Turgenev expressed it, the spiritual children of the Westernizers, not of the Slavophiles.

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[1] The general philosophy of Slavophilism has been treated in a number of monographs, and will not be repeated here. For standard discussions in English see e.g. Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile controversy: history of a conservative utopia in nineteenth-century Russian thought* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1989); and Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the teaching of the Slavophiles: a study of romantic ideology* Harvard historical studies 61 (Gloucester, Mass., 1952).

[2] For instance, in the 1840s their journal *Moskvitianin* had no more than 300 subscribers, while the leading Zapadnik journal, *Otechestvennye Zapiski* had ten times as many. See Hans Kohn, *Pan-slavism: Its history and ideology,* 2nd rev.ed. (New York: 1960), 140.

This is not to say that the Slavophiles left the historical scene leaving no trace. Nothing could be further from the truth. Slavophilism has continued to inspire Russian thinking to this very day. This claim can be argued in different ways. Firstly, one may point out that several thinkers in the late 19th century as well as in the 20th century regarded themselves as neo-Slavophiles. Alternatively, one may claim that certain Russian intellectuals are spiritual heirs to the Slavophiles even if they do not use this designation about themselves. This is the approach of Judith Devlin who divides the enemies of democracy in modern Russia into two camps, Neo-Slavophiles and Neo-Stalinists.[3] The term 'Neo-Slavophiles' in her book is used to designate all Russian nationalists who are more concerned about the preservation of Russian culture and spirituality than about the might of the Russian state.

A third approach would be to generalize the concept of Slavophilism to include many more intellectual currents than the one represented by the Slavophile *kruzhok* of the 1840s and '50s. This is the approach used by S.S. Khoruzhii when he claims that 'the Slavophile idea in the broad sense, as an idea about a self-defined Russian culture, is

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[3] Judith Devlin, *Slavophiles and Commisssars: Enemies of Democracy in Modern Russia* (London, 1999). Most experts on contemporary Russian nationalism identify one or more currents in modern Russian thought as 'Slavophile' or 'neo-Slavophile'. See e.g. Walter Laqueur , *Black Hundred: The Rise Of The Extreme Right In Russia* (New York, 1993); Stephen D. Shenfield, *Russian Fascism: Traditions, Tendencies, Movements* (Armonk, N.Y. 2001); Peter J.S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism And After* (London, 2000); and John B. Dunlop, *The Faces Of Contemporary Russian Nationalism* (Princeton, N.J.,1983).

certainly older than the historical Slavophilism. It has always been an immanent, constituent part of the spiritual world and spiritual development of Russia, and only took its name from Slavophilism'.[4]

In this article I choose a different approach to demonstrate the influence of Slavophile ideas on Russian thought. Firstly, I reserve the term 'Slavophiles' to Orthodox thinkers in Russia in the first half of the 19th century who explicitly identified with this group. Secondly, in order to demonstrate the impact of their teaching on later generations I will not focus on thinkers who openly supported their program. Instead, I will trace the reception of the Slavophile ideas in a more unlikely place, and argue that certain aspects of Slavophile thinking rubbed off also on the thinking of their opponents. Slavophile framings of social and political questions and occasionally also their answers to these questions found resonance among thinkers who on most issues were far removed from Slavophilism and presumably should have been immune to such influences. This was the case with such leading Westernizers as Aleksandr Herzen and Mikhail Bakunin, and, as I will show in this article, with Lev Tolstoi.

My intension is not to re-categorize any of these thinkers *post mortem* as Slavophiles. I am not saying that they, in spite of themselves, had been Slavophiles all along without knowing it but respect the self-understanding of those who do not want be grouped among the Slavophiles. I do claim, however, that the dividing walls between the various groups and intellectual currents in Russia were not watertight; on the contrary, there was a constant osmosis of ideas and concepts across them. This claim

[4] S. S Khoruzhii, 'Transformatsii slavianofil'skoi idei v XX veke', *Voprosy Filosofii,* 1995, issue 2, pp. 52-62, on p. 52.

is neither audacious nor particularly original. Such an exchange of ideologems between groups who see each other as intellectual opponents is a standard phenomenon in the history of ideas: People who live in the same epoch —in our case also in the same country and writing in the same language, grappling with the same philosophical and social problems—inevitably pick up threads and pieces of ideas from each other. By the same token, this means that the Slavophiles for their part on certain issues accepted ideas first elaborated by Zapadniks, sometimes explicitly, at other times without acknowledging their provenance.[5]

The Slavophiles were particularist thinkers who sought and found solutions to social, political, and religious problems in one particular society, the Russian one. Their opponents, on the other hand, were universalists who looked for answers equally valid for all of mankind (answers which nevertheless most of the time happened to be modeled on West European patterns). In the interchange of ideas between Slavophilism and Zapadnichestvo, then, the general tendency was that Slavophiles picked out certain universalist notions and viewpoints from the intellectual baggage of the Zapadniks while the non-Slavophiles on occasion were temped to adopt Slavophile or quasi-Slavophile positions when the issue under discussion was the Russian state, Russian history, and Russian society.

To illustrate these general points I will discuss the relationship of one Russian thinker, Lev Tolstoi, to Slavophilism. Tolstoi can certainly not be classified as a Zapadnik, but even less can he be described as a Slavophile. While his position on many questions

[5] A case of explicit recognition is A.A. Kireev's endorsement of the *glasnost* ideal which he acknowledged was first formulated by zapadniks. See A.A. Kireev *Kratkaia izlozhenie slavianofil'skogo ucheniia* (Moscow, 1890).

evolved and vacillated over time, one of the most constant traits in his thinking was universalism. Whichever topic he set down to examine, be it aesthetics, the art of teaching, relations between the sexes, religious truth, or social justice, he was prone to claim that his solutions were valid for all men and women in all countries. Most of the time he based his arguments on an understanding of human nature as unchangeable and uniform, and dismissed counterarguments about social, national, or cultural variation. It is therefore quite surprising that Tolstoi around 1905 suddenly accepted such Slavophile ideas as the uniqueness of Russian history and tradition and the 'peculiar traits' of Russian national character. Most importantly and specifically, he now came around to endorse the Slavophile idea of the state, and even toyed with their idea that Tsarism was a preferable socio-political system to West European democracy.

Most of Tolstoi's 'Slavophile' utterances and statements were made during a relatively short period of time, stretching from around 1905 to 1907. At that time he was an old man who had passed the zenith of his intellectual power (but certainly not his fame or spiritual authority). Should we then dismiss his Slavophiloid statements as the ramblings and inconsistencies produced by an enfeebled mind? I believe that if we do we miss a chance to trace the meanderings of Slavophile ideas through Russian intellectual history. Even while defeated as trend-setting ideology among the Russian intelligentsia, Slavophilism continued to represent an undercurrent in Russian socio-political debates that non-Slavophiles would turn to and pick ideas from when the situation demanded it. Such 'situations' emerged when European or Russian history took a turn that seemed to bring out the 'exceptionality' of Russia. In Tolstoi's case the outbreak of the first Russian revolution was such an exceptional situation.

In 1978 the Russian scholar Konstantin Lomunov claimed that no-one had made a thorough study of Tolstoi's relationship with Slavophilism.[6] In 1985 Boris Paramonov followed up by claiming that 'as far as we know, Tolstoi's connection to Slavophilism has not been noted, neither in the philosophical, nor in the historical literature.'[7] This is not entirely correct. In his magisterial work *The Slavophile controversy* from 1975 (Polish edition 1964) Andrzej Walicki compared Tolstoi's teaching to that of Konstantin Aksakov over several pages. Walicki rightly pointed out that we find 'certain striking similarities' between Aksakov's anarchism and certain elements of Tolstoi's teaching.[8] He reached this conclusion, however, not by identifying connections or intellectual encounters between the two thinkers, but only by comparing their ideas.

Below, I will argue that the striking similarities was not a matter of coincidental dogmatic overlap, but a result of their direct contact.

The section below traces Tolstoi's contacts with the Slavophiles and his exposure to Slavophile ideas both through personal meeting and through reading. Next, I present a short exposé of the Slavophile understanding of the state and state power, since this is the element of their ideology that Tolstoi most clearly and explicitly drew upon in his own teaching. Finally, I demonstrate how he reworked this understanding to suit his books.

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[6] K.N. Lomunov, 'Slavianofil'stvo kak nauchnaia problema. Zadachi i printsipy issledovianiia', in *Literaturnye vzgliady i tvorchestvo slavianofilov* (Moscow, 1978), 56.
[7] Boris Paramonov, 'Slavianofil'stvo', *Grani*, 40, 1985, 232.
[8] Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, 279.

When Tolstoi was living in Moscow in the 1850s he met with all the leading members of the first Slavophile circle: the Kireevskii brothers, Ivan and Petr; Sergei Aksakov and his two sons, Konstantin and Ivan; as well as with the recognized ringleader of the group, Aleksei Khomiakov. The Aksakov family Tolstoi was introduced to in 1956. When he later reminisced about his encounters with these people he described them in very positive terms. According to Tolstoi's doctor Dushan Makovitskii, who lived with the Tolstois from 1904 until writer's death in 1910 and meticulously wrote down every word his great idol uttered in his presence, Tolstoi portrayed the early Slavophiles as highly moral people who never permitted themselves to say anything but the truth. In the 1840s he had sympathized with their entire worldview, he confided, even with their political ideas and their concept of Russian statehood.[9] According to Makovitskii, Tolstoi talked about the Slavophiles with greater enthusiasm than about any others, and even claimed that ' the Slavophiles have exerted a greater influence on me, on my spiritual turn of mind and my education, than any other Russians. That includes their entire way of thinking and their perception of the people.'[10] While the qualifier 'than any other *Russians'* must be noted here—Tolstoi on other occasions expressed just as great, or greater admiration for many non-Russian thinkers—the quotation at the very least suggests that he was not averse to learning from the Slavophiles.

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[9] Dushan Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo 1904-1910: "Iasnopolianskie zapiski"* (Moscow, 1979), vol. 2, 1979, 2, 566. In fact, in 1956 Tolstoi had jotted down in his diary that ‘appearently, having been a Zapadnik I have become a fierce Slavophile’. Lev Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1930-1972), vol. 47, 74.

[10] Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo 1904-1910:* vol. 2, 107ff.

We cannot reconstruct in detail what was said about the Russian state and the Russian people in the Slavophile discussions of the 1850s which Tolstoi participated in, but a good and succinct introduction to the Slavophiles' ideas on these topics may be found in Konstantin Aksakov's article 'On the inner situation of Russia'.[11] This article was written in 1855, the year before Tolstoi met him—as a memorandum to tsar Aleksandr II upon his accession to the Russian throne as an attempt to impress upon the young monarch a correct understanding of his duties—as the Slavophiles saw it—as the father of the nation. While several Russian intellectuals, including Aleksandr Herzen presented Aleksandr II with petitions and exhortations on this occasion, Aksakov could nourish greater hopes than most of them of finding a willing ear since he, unlike most other Russian intellectuals, professed himself to be a monarchist. Aksakov's Tsarism, however, was of a rather peculiar kind, bordering in fact, on anarchism, a point that apparently was not lost on Tolstoi, who himself was strongly

[11] Many of the ideas presented in this memorandum were anticiped in the posthumously published, unfinished articles ‘On the basic principles of Russian history’ and the sequel ‘On the same topic’, appearently written in 1849 and 1850, respectively. See ‘Ob osnovnykh nachalakh russkoi istorii’ and ‘O tom zhe’, in K. Aksakov, *Sobranie sochineniia*, vol. 2, Moscow 1961), 1-6, and 7-16. The most comprehensive expose of Aksakov’s views, however, is contained in the memorandum. See Edward Chmielewski, *Tribune of the Slavofiles. Konstantin Aksakov (*Gainesville, Florida, 1961), 69.

influenced by anarchist ideas and indeed is often portrayed as one of the founding fathers of anarchism.[12]

According to Aksakov, the Russians are the only people in the world who have fully understood the Savior's injunction to 'render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's' (Matth. 22,21). The Russians are a non-political people and as such do not want to participate in the business of the state. They recognize that true freedom is an inner, moral, and religious quality that will be lost for everyone who engages in external, political affairs. Political liberty is not genuine freedom, but rather the opposite of freedom. In order to safeguard their true freedom, the Russians have therefore extracted from society (or 'the land', *zemlia*) an institution to which they leave the dirty but necessary work of external rule, and that is the *state (gosudarstvo)*. The first Russian state was established through the invitation of the Scandinavian Vikings, the Variagians. The legend of the Variagians had often been exploited by Russian monarchist historians as a justification for tsarism. Most of the time the legend had been seen as proof that the Russians were unable to rule themselves. Aksakov, however, read a rather different message into this famous narrative: he saw the Chronicle story as evidence that the Russians did not *want* to rule themselves, and for that reason had *voluntarily renounced* the authority to rule.

[12] See e.g. George Woodcock, *Anarchism* (Harmondsworth, 1979), 207-219. On the anarchism of Aksakov, see Nikolai Losskii, *Kharakter russkogo naroda* (Frankfurt am Main, 1957), 50ff; and Nikolai Berdiaev, *Russkaia ideia* (Paris, 1970), 148; and in particular Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, 238-278.

The destiny of man, Aksakov explains, is to approach God. The basic law of human existence is Love, and this law men find within themselves. If mankind had been without sin, the need for a state would not have risen, and the kingdom of God would already have been established on earth. However, due to the weaknesses and sinful nature of man an external law is required to keep our base inclinations in check. This necessitates the institution of statehood, a power of this world. The establishment of this external power, however, does not in any way alter the inner, moral destiny of man. The state is only an instrument to help human beings to achieve their spiritual goal and it should certainly not be invested with any absolute or divine authority.[13] The tsar should not be regarded as God's chosen instrument, but as the chosen instrument of the people. At the same time, Aksakov asserts, somewhat unexpectedly, the power of the state must be limitless. Were it not, the people itself would have to partake in the running of political affairs themselves. The only acceptable, Christian model of political rule is therefore autocracy, or Tsarism.

Autocracy, according to Aksakov, is based on the mutual recognition of non-interference between the ruler and his subjects. This principle the Russian people have adhered to unfailingly, while the Russian tsars have regrettably deviated from it. Starting with Peter I, the Russian state has interfered in the inner life of the people and in numerous ways tried to regulate their daily life. But by doing so the state has slowly been digging its own grave. When a people is deprived of its inner freedom, it inevitably seeks compensation in spurious political liberty. The mutual trust between

[13] Konstantin Aksakov, ’O vnutrennem polozhenii Rossii’, in N.L. Brodskii, ed. *Rannie slavianofily: A.S. Khomiakov, I.V. Kirevskii, K.S. i I.S. Aksakovy (*Moscow, 1910), 76.

the tsar and his subjects is replaced by lies and deceptions. As a result, the Russian state has gradually been turned into an instrument of oppression, Aksakov laments. The young tsar, however, ought to know that 'today's slave is tomorrow's rebel'.[14] For his own benefit, if for no other reason, the tsar ought to give the inner freedom back to the Russian people.

On the face of it, Aksakov's conception of the state is an apology for unlimited power, and thus the very opposite of anarchism. However, as he presents it, autocracy is only *a lesser evil*, not an absolute good, indeed, it is hardly a good at all. Since *somebody* has to run the state, it is better that this is done by one person only and not by many. A reasonable inference from this line of reasoning, which Aksakov admittedly does not draw himself, is that the tsar, in his capacity as autocratic state leader shouldering the heavy burden of state power, could not partake in the inner spiritual freedom of true Christians.

In Tolstoi's social teaching we find certain elements that resemble Aksakov's ideas as they were presented in 'On the inner situation of Russia'. Like Aksakov, Tolstoi believed that people are defiled morally and spiritually as soon as they begin to engage in politics. Political activity distracts their attention from the important questions in life, which are inner and moral. The contrast between internal and external freedom is drawn just as sharply by Tolstoi as by Aksakov. In his major religious tract *The Kingdom of God is within you* Tolstoi claimed that the liberation of mankind does not come about through revolution or through a change in the external conditions of life. We achieve freedom only by changing our 'understanding of life'

[14] Aksakov, ’O vnutrennem polozhenii’, 87.

(*zhizneponimanie*). As soon as a person understands life in the proper Christian way he or she will feel completely liberated from all and every human power.[15]

While Tolstoi insisted on this crucial point throughout his entire life, he at the same time persistently protested against the use and abuse of state power in Russia. This is paradoxical since according to his own teaching state power in principle was unable to harm those who understand life in the correct way or to deprive them of their true freedom. Tolstoi was never able to fully reconcile the theoretical and the activist strands in his teaching and for that reason his social and political message, while more dynamic and less quietist than Aksakov's doctrine, was also less consistent. Tolstoi could never settle for 'a lesser evil' as the Slavophiles did, but doggedly pressed on to achieve Perfect Society. His aim was nothing less than to bring the Kingdom of God to this world.

Another aspect of Tolstoi's teaching that Slavophile ideas could be latched on to was his theory of 'contagion' (*zarazhenie*) which he applied to various aspects of his doctrine, including his teaching about the state.[16] According to this theory, all acts of human beings, the evil as well as the good ones, are surrounded by a power field, as it were, like magnets.[17] Evil fields are charged with negative energy and good ones with positive energy. Those who enter one of these fields are affected or 'infected'. Since all power is based on violence or the threat thereof, all exercise of power (*vlast'*) is to

[15] Lev Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1930-1972), vol. 28, 167ff.

[16] This theory also informed his aestetics and ethics.

[17] Tolstoi vacillated between biological metaphors like contagion and physical metaphors like magnets.

Tolstoi acts of evil. Whenever the state uses violent means to carry out its functions the subjects are led to believe that violence is an acceptable way to achieve one's goals in life. As a result, their moral sense is blunted.[18]

In *The kingdom of God is within you* (1890-93) autocracy is treated as no better and no worse than republicanism. The distinction between these two models of political power is in this book presented in purely formal terms: in the despotism of one-man rule power is maximally concentrated and violence therefore acquires a particularly glaring form. In constitutional democracies, on the other hand, power is distributed among a large number of oppressors, and the violent nature of state power is less discernible but not less real.[19] To be consistent with his theory of contagion, however, Tolstoi ought to have preferred autocracy to democracy: when all power is concentrated in the hands of only one man or woman, this person represents the only source of evil miasma in the country. This, in fact, is a conclusion that Tolstoi himself drew thirteen years after he had finished *The kingdom of God,* in 1906. In a new pamphlet called *On the significance of the Russian revolution* he claimed that any attempt to limit the power of autocracy would only lead to the proliferation of evil sources of contagion. Ultimately, when universal suffrage is introduced, each and every voter will become targets of the politicians' sweet-talk and bribery. In that way the entire population will be drawn into the evil ways of violence and become demoralized.[20]

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[18] Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie,* vol. 29, 113.

[19] ibid., 28, 125.

[20] ibid., 36, 224f.

Even if Tolstoi now accepted autocracy as a somewhat less detrimental system than democracy, he had no intention of whitewashing tsarism as such. He wrote *On the significance of the Russian revolution* in the immediate aftermath of the 1905 revolution and in the preface explained that he a dual objective: first, he wanted to identify which forces that had unleashed the revolution, second, he would point the direction in which the Russian people ought to march now that the revolution had taken place.

By way of introduction to his pamphlet Tolstoi presented a general theory of revolution. He claimed that a revolution will break out whenever the majority of the population in a country have adopted a new and higher understanding of life (*zhizneponimanie*) that is incompatible with the existing social structure. In Russia, the population had over the last generations reached an ever higher level of enlightenment and moral standard while the rulers at the same time had been corrupted by their own privileges and exercise of violence. As a result, the state had become increasingly intolerable for the Russians until they had finally thrown it off. Now, after the revolution, they stood at a crossroads which seemingly presented them with two options only: they could either take state power upon themselves, or submit to the tsar once again. However, both of these venues would inevitably lead to perdition, Tolstoi warned. Luckily, therefore, there was also a third way that most people did not realize: they might abolish state power altogether. If they did, violence, theft, and evil would continue to exist, since people are not angels. But in a stateless society transgression of the moral law would be the exception and not the rule, since violence would no longer be institutionalized.

Three circumstances made the Russians especially well prepared to choose this third path, according to Tolstoi: First, they could learn from the deplorable fate of the Western people. People in Western Europe had tried to mitigate the detrimental effects of state power through active participation in it. In that way they have only succeeded in contracting the decease of power themselves. Like the Slavophiles, Tolstoi now maintained that the only lesson the Russians could learn from the Western world was which social model they should *not* adopt. Instead, Tolstoi insisted, again echoing the Slavophiles, the Russians must build upon their own material and spiritual traditions. Among these traditions he singled out two—rural lifestyle and religious faith—as particularly important. While agriculture in Western countries had been supplanted by commerce and industry as the dominant industries, Russia was still primarily a nation of peasants. Peasants far more than city dwellers can do without state regulations and state interventions in their lives. In the outskirts of the Russian Empire many self-governed peasant communities (*obshchiny*) had lived in peace and harmony for long periods of time until they had been detected by tax collectors and other state officials, Tolstoi claimed.

In addition, the Russians had an inner, religious asset that was missing in other peoples, Tolstoi insisted. Christianity had struck deeper roots among the Russians than among other peoples. The teaching of Christ had influenced their way of life as well as their way of thinking in a manner that was simply unique. The reasons for this exceptionality Tolstoi found in the way the Christian message had been introduced into Russian society. The Gospel had been brought to the Western peoples in Latin, a language they did not understand, and prior to the Reformation Latin was the only language they heard in their churches. By contrast, to the Russians the good tidings

had been preached in the vernacular. In addition, the Byzantine and Russian prelates were far more obtuse than their Western colleagues, and less adept in concealing the true import of the Christian message from their flocks. This somewhat peculiar rendering of the history of Orthodoxy in Russia made it possible for Tolstoi to present genuine religious faith as an advantage of the Russian people without in any way softening his harsh criticism of the official Russian church.

Tolstoi went on to list a number of allegedly typical traits and national customs among the Russians as evidence that they had understood the teaching of Jesus better than anyone else: They recognize all men as brothers irrespective of race and color; they respect the poor no less than the rich, they call convicts 'the unfortunate' (*neschastnye*) and by that indicate that they do not condemn them. Furthermore, the Russian word *'proshchai'* may mean both 'farewell' and 'forgive me', and this ambiguity, according to Tolstoi, reveals the Russians' strong recognition of personal guilt. Finally, as his crowning argument Tolstoi adduced the Russians' attitude toward state power as evidence of their true understanding of the message of Jesus. The Russians had always preferred to yield to rather than participate in the state, because they perceived exercise of any kind of power as a sin.[21]

In *On the significance of the Russian revolution* Tolstoi moved close to a number of typically Slavophile positions. Most significantly, he expressed high hopes in the Russian people due to their allegedly unique national character, and he understood this national character in very much the same way as the Slavophiles did. This was a

[21] ibid., 36, 334-8.

new departure since most of Tolstoi's other writings were marked by a distinctly universalistic message. What was the background for this new turn?

Tolstoi's new emphasis on the Russian people is discernible not only in *On the significance of the Russian revolution* but also in his diaries from the same period. On 2 February 1906, for instance, Tolstoi divided the peoples of the earth into two categories: Some strive to achieve material well-being, while others regard the life of the spirit as the highest good. The Western peoples belong to the first type and the Eastern ones to the second. The Russians Tolstoi placed in the second category.[22] . On 3 July the same year Tolstoi wrote that 'if it is true that the Russian people consists of uncivilized barbarians, then we have a future.' In that case, the Western peoples could be likened to civilized barbarians, whom it made no sense to emulate.[23]

In one of his diary notes Tolstoi tells us where he got these ideas from. They originated from Dmitrii Khomiakov (1841-1918), son of the leading Slavophile thinker Aleksei Khomiakov and himself an ardent proponent of Slavophile ideas. Like Tolstoi, Khomiakov *fils* owned an estate outside Tula and on some occasions he visited Iasnaia Poliana. Between 1899 and 1908 Khomiakov wrote three books on related topics, *Autocracy*, *Orthodoxy*, and *Narodnost'*, of which Tolstoi read the two first volumes. In particular, *Autocracy* caught his attention. Tolstoi read this book in February 1906 and his copy is littered with underlinings in the text and comments in the margin. According to Makovitskii, Tolstoi on several occasions praised this book

[22] ibid., 55, 188.

[23] ibid., 55, 233.

lavishly, and suggested that it ought to be translated into English.[24] Tolstoi also wanted the Tolstoian publishing house 'Posrednik' to publish an edition of the book, and set down to write a preface for it himself.[25] As work on this preface progressed, however, it became clear to him that it ought to be published as a separate booklet instead. This was done, and in 1906 the text was published as the booklet with which we are already familiar, *On the significance of the Russian revolution.*

In order to understand Tolstoi's fascination with *Autocracy* a brief outline of the content of this book is required.[26] Like Konstantin Aksakov before him, Dmitrii Khomiakov wanted to present a general exposé of the Slavophile teaching on the state. He distinguished between two diametrically opposite attitudes towards state power. As expected we find autocracy on the one side, while on other he places not only republicanism, but also absolutism. Absolutism and republicanism Khomiakov regarded as two varieties of the same basic model.

What then, is the difference between the two allegedly diametrically opposed models of state authority? The autocratic system, Khomiakov explained, may be found primarily among people who place spiritual values above mundane interests. This attitude dominates in the East, including Russia. The republican system, on the other hand, is found among people who see the meaning of life in the acquisition of earthly goods. This system may be traced back to the Phoenicians, the materialistic people *par excellence* in antiquity. From the Phoenicians the Romans picked up this attitude.

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[24] Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo*, vol. 2, 49.

[25] ibid., vol. 2, 101.

[26] Dmitrii Khomiakov, *Pravoslavie, Samederzhavie, Narodnost'* (Montreal, 1983).

In the Roman empire this system was in time transformed into caecarism, a model of rule that in the modern period continued in Western Europe under the guise of absolutism. The common element in republicanism and absolutism is that in both varieties of the model politics tend to permeate society completely, Khomiakov asserted. By contrast, in the Eastern, autocratic state, political structures are reduced to the bare necessities. Autocracy resembles absolutism only in the sense that all power is concentrated in the hands of one person, but this is a superficial similarity. Far more important is the fact that unlike the Western absolutist ruler the autocrat does not stand above his people, but stems from it and embodies its general will. The autocrat expresses the genuine self-awareness of the people, and he is personally responsible to it. In the autocratic state power has originally belonged to the people, Khomiakov claims, but the people did not possess this power as a *right*. Indeed, the Russian people does not perceive of politics in legal categories at all, but as a series of *obligations*. Someone must take upon themselves to the onerous burden to rule the country and defend the inhabitants against internal and external threats, also by wielding the sword. Since the people prefers not to do it themselves, they have empowered the autocrat to do it for them.

This transfer of authority in the autocratic state has not been enshrined in any constitution or *contract sociale*. Only in those countries where state power has been established through military conquest does the need for formal legal treaties between the ruler and the subjects arise. In Russia, Khomiakov claims, this was not the case, as the Russian state had been established through the peaceful invocation of the Scandinavian Vikings.

Even if the Russian tsar in principle had unlimited power, he could not rule arbitrarily, Khomiakov asserted. The tsar was obliged to act within the bounds defined by the Orthodox faith and the popular will. In order to gauge this will, the tsar could convoke an assembly of the estates, a *Zemskii sobor*, where the people could express their viewpoints and present pieces of advice to the Monarch. The ruler was under no obligation to follow this advice but more often than not he would nevertheless do so. When he did, he was just as much listening to his inner voice: Since he was organically linked to his people, his thinking was congruent with their worldview and ideas.

Khomiakov's theory—as Aksakov's before him—implied that the autocrat did not rule by divine right, such as the Western absolutist monarch claimed to do. Khomiakov admitted that that according to St. Paul all power emanates from God Himself, but, he added, the apostle also taught that we shall bear one another's burdens (Gal 6, 2), and this is precisely what the tsar did. The tsar had self-sacrificingly taken upon himself to carry the burden of political power on behalf of the people. While in an absolutist state the subjects sag under the heaviness of the state, the subjects of an autocrat will hardly notice the state power at all since it is, metaphorically speaking, virtually weightless (*nevesomoe*). The reason is that the weight of power has been lifted off the shoulders of the people and onto the autocrat. Through this act of sacrifice the tsar is sanctified. He becomes a *podvizhnik*, a hero of the true faith.[27] Gratefully, the people respond by placing unlimited trust in him.

[27] Khomiakov, , *Samederzhavie*, 145.

At this point Khomiakov drew a parallel between material poverty and autocracy. Just as voluntary renunciation of earthly goods is a virtue for each Christian believer, it is also a virtue for the entire Christian people to make do with a minimum of political institutions. In both cases scarcity is a means to suppress base passions, in the former case covetousness, in the latter, the lust for power.[28] This paragraph in Khomiakov's booklet Tolstoi both underlined and marked with an NB in the margin.[29] Here he had come across an idea that resonated well with his own teaching. In his political and religious tracts Tolstoi had frequently presented the struggle against wealth and political power as two aspects of an overall ascetic program to discipline the body and the soul.[30]

In Khomiakov's typology the Russians are not a pure-bred Eastern people. Thanks to the influence of Christianity they have avoided the stagnation that characterizes so many Eastern peoples, he asserted. The land of the Russians is located between the East and the West, and they have been able to reap the benefits of both worlds. Under Peter I, however, the balanced development of the Russian state had deplorably tipped in the direction of Western influences. As a result, Russian autocracy had undergone a metamorphosis and been transformed into a bad copy of Western absolutism. The rulers were no longer called tsars but *imperatory*, and they surrounded themselves with an absolutist bureaucracy. Just like Louise XIV had proclaimed that 'l'etat, c'est moi', Nikolai I had pointed to his own chest and proclaimed that 'everything ought to

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[28] Khomiakov, *Samederzhavie*, 156.

[29] *Biblioteka L'va Tolstogo v Iasnoi Poliane* (Moscow, 1975), vol. 1a, 238.

[30] Pål Kolstø, *Sannhet i løgn. Lev Tolstoj og den ortodokse tro (*Oslo, 1997), 49-50 and 157-175.

emanate from here'.[31] Khomiakov strongly disagreed with Konstantin Pobedonostsev who had insisted that the state power should be the 'alpha and omega, the first and the last', in the life of the people.[32] Nothing of the kind!, Khomiakov retorted: the meek autocratic tsars in Muscovy regarded themselves as nothing more than one element among many in Russian society.[33]

The change in Russian statehood, however, had not changed the people's understanding of the state. The Russians continued to regard the ruler at *their* chosen one. For that reason they would not rebel against him, Khomiakov opined. When the second edition of *Autocracy* was published in 1905, after the First Russian Revolution, the author added a postscript in which he admitted that last year's events seemingly had invalidated his theories. The revolution had shown that the Russian people was fully prepared to topple the powers that be. Khomiakov, however, chose to interpret this as dissatisfaction with the alien, absolutist guise which Russian tsarism had acquired. When an assembly of the estates, a Duma, was convened, tempers would cool again, he predicted. The people would see the establishment of this institution as a sign that the tsar would return to the old ways of Russian statehood. Once more he would listen to the voice of the people and heed their advice.

While Khomiakov introduced some new distinctions and nuances in the Slavophile theory of the state, the gist of his message was basically identical with what Aksakov and the other early Slavophiles had propounded before him. As Nikolai Berdiaev

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[31] Khomiakov, *Pravoslavie,* 115.

[32] K.P. Pobedonostsev, ‘Vlast’ i Nachal’stvo’, *Sochineniia* (St.Pb., 1996), 426.

[33] Khomiakov, *Pravoslavie,* 116.

noted, the most remarkable aspect of Khomiakov *fils*' book was how few traces the last 50 years of Russian history had left on it.[34] Khomiakov did not aspire to be an original thinker, all he wanted to be was a faithful disciple of his father and his father's friends. This is also how he was generally understood. When Tolstoi waxed lyrical about *Autocracy*, he implicitly endorsed the entire Slavophile theory of the state, and he knew that to be the case.

Various aspects of the Slavophile concept of the state could be attractive for Tolstoi. In this teaching he recognized his own conviction that man must place spiritual life above the life of the body, and he even played with the idea that the life of the spirit could unfold more unrestrainedly in autocratic Russia than in countries where the common people were involved in politics. Furthermore, Tolstoi accepted Dmitrii Khomiakov's distinction between absolutism and autocracy[35] and the idea that political power was a burden he found 'valuable'.[36] Tolstoi also embraced the notion that people have no political rights. In his diary he wrote that 'man has only obligations'. This sentence he wrote twice in a row, the last time in capital letters.[37] In 1907 Tolstoi discussed in his diary the suggestion that one might just as well leave the running of the state to the morally most deprived people, a notion he claimed to have found in Slavophilism. If state power cannot be avoided, this idea is 'perfectly correct', he commented.[38]

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[34] Nikolai Berdiaev, *A.S. Khomiakov* (Moscow, 1912), 191.

[35] Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo*, 2, 41.

[36] ibid., 2, 59.

[37] Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie*, 55, 216.

[38] ibid., 56, 54.

In a conversation at Iasnaia Poliana recorded by Dushan Makovitskii Tolstoi's son Andrei, himself a monarchist, found it odd that his father should express sympathy with Dmitrii Khomiakov's book as long as he himself did not accept any form of state power. To this Tolstoi had replied that the Russian people held on to autocracy because they valued inner peace above politics.[39] Even so, autocracy would not last forever, Tolstoi had predicted. A person may be fond of autocracy the way he thinks fondly about his own childhood: in both cases, one has to accept that the object of love is irrevocably a thing of the past.[40]

Tolstoi, then, relatively soon recovered from his infatuation with Dmitrii Khomiakov's state theory. It should be noted, however, that his strong interest in Slavophile ideas around the time of the first Russian revolution cannot be traced back to his reading of Khomiakov alone. Already in April 1905, almost a year before he read *Autocracy*, Tolstoi in his diary expressed sympathy with the Slavophile theory of the state:

> The Slavophiles are correct when they say that the Russian people shun power… [The Russians] are ready to leave [power] to bad people rather than sully themselves with it. In this they are right, if that is what they do…It is much easier for a person who lives under the power of tyranny to realize the moral life than for a person who partakes in the power.[41]

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[39] Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo*, 2, 41f.

[40] ibid., 2, 107.

[41] Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie* 36, 240.

In 1905 Tolstoi wrote the article *At the end of a century* (*Konets veka*) which anticipated several of the ideas that later found their way into *On the significance of the Russian revolution*. Already in this earlier work Tolstoi claimed that the Russians have 'an entirely different spiritual mould' from the Germanic and Romanic peoples. This allegedly unique collective mentality expressed itself *inter alia* in a different attitude toward state power.[42]

It therefore seems that Tolstoi picked up Dmitrii Khomiakov's book on autocracy in order to find support for ideas which he was already mulling over. The book did hardly have many surprises in store for him. Tolstoi was well acquainted with the Slavophile teaching, and knew exactly what he could expect to find. Why, then, did he turn to Slavophilism precisely at this moment? The answer seems reasonably clear: like so many of his Russian contemporaries, Tolstoi felt an urgent need to understand and explain the First Russian revolution. This revolution had come like a bolt from the blue, not only on Tolstoi but on the entire Russian intelligentsia. To be sure, many had predicted that a revolution would break out at any time. Some, like Tolstoi, had expected the coming upheaval to be spiritual and moral, while others, like Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks, looked forward to a political and social uprising. Few if any, however, had predicted that the anticipated revolution would take place *in Russia*. The Marxists, for their part, had insisted that the most technically and economically advanced countries in the West would have to blaze the trail towards the promised land of the classless society. Russia, for its part, would have to pass through a capitalist of development before she would be ripe for a socialist

[42] ibid., 240.

transformation. In 1905, when the envisaged order of events had been overturned by 'life itself', as Russians are prone to say, observers and activists were desperately searching for theories that could explain how the Russians had suddenly moved up to become the avant-garde of historical progress. Thus, for instance by the time of the next Russian revolution in 1917 Nikolai Bukharin and Vladimir Lenin had developed a refinement of the Marxist theory of revolution which said that the chain of capitalist states would bread down first in its 'weakest link', Russia.[43]

In *The end of a century* Tolstoi explicitly stated that his aim was to explain why the imminent global cataclysm 'has started and must be completed precisely in Russia and nowhere else.'[44] In order to give a plausible explanation for this 'inevitability' he fell back on Slavophilism, a strand in Russian intellectual tradition that for decades had insisted that Russians are different from other peoples and particularly well equipped, spiritually and materially, to realize the perfect society. Since Tolstoi's own social teaching, as we have seen, already had some affinities with Slavophilism he did not have to turn his back on everything he had stood for earlier in order to incorporate some Slavophile elements in it. On some points a minor change of emphasis would do the trick. Thus, for instance, the idea that state power is a source of deleterious contagion could without too much trouble be reworked into a theory of state power as a burden. On other points, however, he now clearly contradicted earlier statements. Thus, for instance, in *The kingdom of God is within you* Tolstoi had heaped scorn

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[43] Leszek Kolakowski, *Main currents of Marxism: its rise, growth, and dissolution* (Oxford, 1978), vol. 2, 493; Edward Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution* (London, 1990), 29.

[44] Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie*, 36, 261.

upon those who had 'proved' the peaceful origin of the Russian state by pointing to the legend of the calling of the Variagians.[45] In *The end of a century*, however, he suddenly accepted the Slavophile interpretation of this legend. As now paraphrased by Tolstoi, this is what the Eastern Slavs told the Variagian envoys: 'We [the Russians] do not want to partake in the sin of power. If you do not regard power as a sin, then come and rule over us'.[46]

When Tolstoi had developed his social ideas in the 1880s he had to some extent built upon his own observations of the daily life of Russian peasants. Their rough and simple lifestyle had convinced him about the blessings of outdoor physical labor, and led him to denounce the idle life of the urban upper classes. From the values and mores of the Russian peasants, as he interpreted them, he had extracted a number of social 'laws ' and moral precepts which, he maintained, were valid for all people in every part of the world. This claim made him a universalist thinker. When Tolstoi around 1905 began to emphasize the Russian roots of the lifestyle he preached, his teaching returned in a sense to the sources from which it had originally be extracted.

This is not to say that Tolstoi all along had been a closet Slavophile who had now finally come out in the open. On many issues deep disagreements between him and the Slavophiles remained. Also the overall tenor of their thinking differed: the Slavophiles saw man as a fallen creature who can never attain a state of sinlessness in this life and therefore has to settle for compromises and lesser evils, while Tolstoi

[45] ibid., 28, 134.

[46] ibid., 36, 247.

throughout his entire career single-mindedly insisted that mankind must always pursue perfection, both as individuals and social groups.

In Russian intellectual history Slavophilism functioned, as it were, as a reservoir of ideas that thinkers who did not belong to the Slavophile circle could draw upon and make use of when the situation called for it. A number of Russian thinkers with very different backgrounds dipped into this reservoir on various occasions. A few examples will illustrate the point: When Aleksandr Herzen experienced the failure of the 1848 revolution in France, he lost faith in the ability of West Europeans to carry out a successful socialist transformation of society. The reason for this he found in an alleged bourgeoization of Western man. Not only the upper classes but all citizens of Western countries, including the workers, had obtained some property that they were loath to part with. They had acquired a vested interest in the existing social order and were lost for the cause of revolution. In Russia, however, the situation was quite different, Herzen concluded. In that country all social classes, even the nobility, were alienated from the state. In particular, Herzen pinned his hopes on the Russian peasant commune which he believed could form the basis for a future classless society.[47]

[47] 'The artel and the peasant commune, the sharing of profits and the sharing of fields, the village assembly and the organization of villages into selfruled volosts—these are cornerstones in the edifice of our future free and collective living…. Europe has shown a remarkable ineptitude for social revolution. We think that Russia is not equally incapable for such an upheaval, and on this point we agree with the

Another leading early Zapadnik, Mikhail Bakunin, spent most of his adult life as a revolutionary in Western Europe and never gave up his faith in the revolutionary potential of the Western downtrodden masses. Even so, the 1848 revolution prompted also him to reorient his hopes and expectations, at least for a while, to the Slavic peoples in general and the Russians in particular. After the Panslavist congress in Prague in 1848 where he participated as the only Russian present, Bakunin wrote 'An appeal to the Slavs' in which he hurled out a prophecy of a world-wide conflagration that would start in Russia: 'The constellation of revolution will rise above Moscow, high and beautiful, above a sea of blood and fire, to become the lead star toward the good society for the entire liberated mankind'. [48] Seventy years later Vladimir Lenin demonstrated in action his faith in the revolutionary potential of the Russians by carrying out a successful revolution on their behalf, without waiting for a cue from Western Europe.

Slavophiles. This is the basis for our faith in Russia's future, a faith which I have propagated since 1848.' A. I. Gertsen, *Byloe i Dumy* (Kiev, 1976), 514-5.
Tibor Szamuely goes as far as to claim that 'it was through a fusion of the three ingredients of Westernism, Slavophilism and socialism that Herzen founded the uniquely Russian philosophy of Populism (*Narodnichestvo*).' Tibor Szamuely, *The Russian Tradition* (London, 1988), 263. See also Martin Malia, 'Herzen and the Peasant Commune', in Ernest G. Simmons (ed.), *Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought (*Cambridge, 1955), 197-217.

[48] Mikhail Bakunin, *Izbrannye sochineniia* (no place given: 1920) vol. 1, 38.

Russian religious thinkers often had ambivalent attitude towards Slavophilism. Many of them engaged in polemics against Slavophilism, while they at the same time incorporated certain Slavophile elements into their philosophy. Fedor Dostoevskii, for instance, in his journal *Vremia* tried to define a middle course between Zapadnichestvo and Slavophilism which he called *Pochvennichestvo*. Many historians have nevertheless identified him as a true spiritual heir to the Slavophiles.[49] Dostoevskii's younger friend, the philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev, criticized the Slavophiles for their allegedly myopic nationalism and for separating Russia from European culture,[50] but that did not prevent contemporary observers from detecting an allegedly strong Slavophile streak in Solov'ev's own thinking. Pavel Miliukov characterized Solov'ev as the leading figure among what he called 'the left group of Slavophiles', although, as he admitted, the member of this group sometimes 'refused to rank themselves among the adherents of [the Slavophile] teaching'.[51]

Such characterizations that ignore people's self-understanding are in my view not particularly helpful. It makes for a tidier analysis if we reserve the label 'Slavophile' for those thinkers who actually identified with the school of thought. What we can do, however, is to treat Slavophilism as a system of thought consisting of a number of ideas that other Russian thinkers availed themselves of without subscribing to

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[49] See Ernest J. Simmons, *Dostoevsky: the making of a novelist* (New York, 1962), 81.

[50] Vl. Solov'ev, 'Natsional'nyi vopros v Rossii', in Vl. Solov'ev, *Literaturnaia kritika* (Moscow, 1990), 303-06.

[51] Pavel Miliukov, 'Razlozhenie slavianofil'stva, *Istoriia Russkoi intelligentsii* (St. Pb., 1903), 267 and 295-7.

Slavophilism as such. There was a constant exchange of ideas among the various intellectual currents in Russia in the 19th century, and inevitably a lot of borrowing took place. This was two-way traffic: also the Slavophiles treated the ideologies of their opponents as reservoirs of ideas which they could pick from without committing themselves to the entire package. Herzen's famously described the relationship between his own Zapadnik camp and the early Slavophiles was a common heart, a common commitment to a common cause, Russia.[52]

Herzens metaphor may perhaps help us understand also how the inveterate universalist Lev Tolstoi could take resort in Slavophile ideas. While the 1848 revolution brought out the patriot in Herzen the 1905 revolution did the same for Tolstoi. To understand and explain the First Russian revolution, he picked out those elements in this teaching that suited his purposes, made a few adjustments of his social and political message to allow for a greater role for the Russian people, and contradicted his earlier writings on a few minor points. Obviously, however, he did not feel that he had gone through any kind of intellectual conversion when he wrote *The end of a century* and *On the significance of the Russian revolution.* jot

[52] Herzen, *Byloe i Dumy*, 497 and 535 (from chapter XXX, 'Ne nashi').